

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

Update on program, services and operations at Kentucky School for the Blind and Kentucky School for the Deaf

Applicable Statute or Regulation:

KRS 167.015

History/Background:

Existing Policy. Legal authority and structure. As prescribed in KRS 167.015, the Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) in Louisville and the Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) in Danville are managed and controlled by the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE). The KBE has authorized the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to oversee KSB and KSD. The schools are considered divisions within KDE.

The current administrative structure at each of the schools includes a principal, campus manager, outreach director, operations officer at KSD and other supervisors. At the KDE, a director and a collaborative team are responsible for on-going and daily oversight of the two schools. The schools and the collaborative team are directly under the supervision of the Associate Commissioner for the Office of Special Instructional Services within KDE.

In addition to being schools that provide full-time educational services to residential and day students from across the state who are deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired, KSB and KSD serve as statewide educational resources to schools and districts. They provide technical assistance, resources and other services to districts, parents, students and other agencies or organizations that serve these populations of students. Currently, approximately 80% of students with sensory loss (deaf/hard of hearing, blind/visually impaired) are served in local school districts.

School Improvement process

Even though the KBE had oversight responsibility for the two schools for many years, beginning in the late 1990's, the Board focused more attention on the two schools in order to ensure the students performed commensurate with their abilities and the expectations of the KBE and the KDE. Impetus for this attention included data indicating that students who were blind/visually impaired and or deaf/hard of hearing statewide and at the schools had significant gaps in achievement and in transition from school to postsecondary education or work. In the 1998-99 school year, curriculum audits and assessment reviews were conducted at the schools. In subsequent school years, KDE personnel provided training and technical

assistance and a highly skilled educator was assigned to each of the schools after scholastic reviews were conducted.

In October 2001, KDE created the KSB/KSD Oversight Committee to support the schools and hear regular updates from them. After collecting more data on the performance of the students and other needs of the schools, the KBE decided that an external study of fiscal, facility and program structures at both schools was needed as well as a review of services statewide for identified students. The American Institutes of Research (AIR) from Palo Alto, California was selected to conduct this review. Their report was presented to the KBE at its December 2001 Board meeting. Below is a brief summary of the major recommendations of the 100+ page report:

1. Improve early identification and intervention for deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired students;
2. Promote and support more family involvement and family-oriented services for these students statewide and at the schools;
3. Extend high-quality local options for educational services through educational cooperatives so that appropriate service alternatives are available closer to where students reside;
4. Increase the role and promotion of KSB and KSD as statewide resources for students and practitioners;
5. Establish a clearer philosophy of the service and purpose of the two schools;
6. Develop more specialized services for students with complex needs including students who are deaf/blind;
7. Address the shortage of service providers for these populations (teachers, interpreters, etc.);
8. Invest more in technology and career and technical education at the schools;
9. Set up an appropriate administrative structure for services for all students who are blind/visually impaired and deaf/hard of hearing across the state: and
10. Determine what facilities are needed to support services for students at the schools and appropriately renovate, expand and/or surplus as needed.

Five-year Implementation Plan

As a result of the AIR report, staff at KDE was asked to develop a method for soliciting widespread stakeholder input to use in drafting a comprehensive implementation plan in response to the report. Seven statewide stakeholder committees were formed to make recommendations on the following topics: (1) Early identification; (2) Supporting parents and families; (3) Closing the gap in the achievement of these students; (4) Expanding outreach services; (5) meeting the needs of students with complex and/or multiple impairments; (6) Increasing the number of service providers; and (7) Comprehensive high school services at both schools. In addition to these stakeholder groups, nine (9) regional committees were formed to address issues under the topic of interventions and services closer to home.

The committees were defined by the boundaries of the eleven (11) special education cooperatives with the exception of four neighboring cooperatives that met together for joint

planning purposes. Over 400 stakeholders participated in this initiative, with approximately 80 stakeholder meetings occurring throughout the state. The stakeholders represented school administrators, special and regular education teachers, related services personnel, students, parents, community members, higher education, advocacy organizations, parent organizations, professional organizations, and public and private agencies with an interest in these students. The culmination of this work resulted in sixteen stakeholder reports with some 283 pages of text, 108 goal statements and 745 strategies and actions recommended for the Board to consider.

A group of KDE, KSB, KSD, and Kentucky Deaf/Blind Project staff reviewed all the recommendations from all the stakeholder committees, information on statewide performance of blind/visually impaired (B/VI), deaf/hard of hearing (D/HH), and deaf/blind students, and other pertinent information. This information was synthesized, summarized and compiled into a Five-Year Implementation Plan. This plan was presented to and approved by the KBE in August 2004. The Plan anticipates activities under each topic that will cover a five-year period. Following is a summary of the major topics in the plan and the activities begun or completed to date:

Services for young children:

- a) A collaborative preschool program at KSD for KSD and Boyle County students;
- b) On-going conversation with First Steps to train providers on issues specific to students who are B/VI, D/HH, or deaf/blind;
- c) Development and distribution of a brochure for the medical community for early signs of sensory loss; and
- d) On-going collaborative efforts with a private agency to expand preschool services for children who are B/VI.

Center-based school program (campus program):

- a) KSD and KSB have made continuous progress in student performance based on CATS data and other measures. In areas where additional improvement is necessary, each school has developed strategies to address this. Student performance information from both schools is given in more detail in Attachment A;
- b) Both schools have cooperative arrangements with neighboring school districts to allow students to attend classes off campus to supplement the offerings at KSB and KSD, especially in the area of career and technical education;
- c) KSD offers career and technical education classes that are attended by hearing students from neighboring districts to promote collaborative education and provide additional opportunities for KSD students to be included with non-disabled peers; and
- d) Both schools are expanding the opportunities for student learning after the regular school day through enhanced student life activities.

Enrollment figures for each school over the past five years are detailed in Attachment B.

Outreach services and statewide resource center services:

- a) KSB has installed a new software program and made other changes to enhance the services of the Kentucky Instructional Materials Resource Center (KIMRC) that provides textbooks and educational aids to B/VI students across the state. During the 2005-2006 school year, KIMRC shipped books and/or materials to 580 students;
- b) KSD has begun an Instructional Media Resource Center to use as a lending and training library for service providers across the state;
- c) KSD is currently negotiating with the local hospital to develop a health careers program to be available to KSD students that will involve class work as well as real life experience that will lead to job placements;
- d) KSB outreach staff, in conjunction with the Big East Special Education Cooperative and Morehead State University, just completed a week-long opportunity for older B/VI high school students to live in a college dormitory and learn about college classes, living and socializing to better prepare them for a successful transition;
- e) KSB has expanded its short course services to more students and KSD has begun a short course program to offer B/VI and D/HH, respectively, services to students across the state that attend each school for a short period of time to learn or improve specific skills;
- f) KSB and KSD have employed staff to specifically assist parents across the state to better understand the unique needs of their children and to assist the parents and families to obtain information on educational needs and services. This is accomplished by parent support meetings, newsletters, planned activities and other methods of information sharing;
- g) KSB and KSD assigned outreach consultants to each special education cooperative to provide on-going technical assistance and consultation based on the unique needs of the area and its students;
- h) KSB outreach staff provided 227 different services to 187 B/VI students in 162 school districts across the state during the 2005-2006 school year. These services included functional vision learning media assessments, VI consultations, orientation and mobility assessment and consultation, a low vision clinic, attendance at local Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) meetings, direct services, reading inventory, assistive technology assessment, daily living skills assessment and psychoeducational assessments.
- i) KSD outreach provided numerous activities during the 2005-2006 school year including 1182 consultations, 61 student observations, 226 parent contacts, attendance at 143 ARC meetings, 81 professional development sessions, performing 274 assessments for students and 151 contacts with American Sign Language interpreters in the form of mentoring and distribution of information. Additionally, KSD outreach sponsored a Hands Alive activity for 45 students and parents, a Family Learning Vacation for 25 families, an Usher Syndrome Training for 20 parents and students, direct services to 15 preschool students at three different sites, and supported the Northern Kentucky regional program that serves 24 students;
- j) KSB and KSD outreach consultations have regular contact with teachers of the B/VI and D/HH across the state to distribute information on best practices, assist with individual student needs and to provide a network of support of teachers that are frequently isolated in their local districts;

- k) KSB has staff who produce Braille materials for students and assist districts with their Braille needs; and
- l) An Interpreter Training Plan has been developed in conjunction with KSD, Eastern Kentucky University Interpreter Training Program staff and private agencies serving deaf students to recruit, support and improve the skill level of interpreters in school settings across the state.

An Evaluation Plan to accompany the Implementation Plan has been developed to ensure the activities in the plan are truly making a positive difference on student and teacher performance. The data collected under this Evaluation Plan will be presented at future KBE meetings.

Facilities planning process

In conjunction with the development and operation of the Implementation Plan, a comprehensive look at the facilities and resources at each school was needed. In order to address these issues, a facilities planning process was begun in October 2003 when the KBE asked KDE staff from the Division of Administrations Services, the Division of Facilities Management, and the Office of Special Instructional Services to spearhead the formation of a Facilities Planning Committee (FPC) for KSB and KSD. The committees looked as similar as possible to an FPC that would operate in a local school district and included representatives from teaching staff, residential services staff, administrative staff, alumni associations, parent associations, local officials, advocacy organizations and KDE staff.

The FPC for each school began meeting in January 2004, and met over twenty times during the 2004 calendar year. Existing facilities were examined, programmatic needs were analyzed, and input from a wide variety of stakeholders was considered. Close to the end of the planning process, town hall meetings were held at each campus to provide the opportunity for public comment. An impressive showing of community members was in attendance at each forum and offered comment and recommendations for the FPC to consider. In December 2004, the FPC for each school submitted facilities plans to the KBE that detailed the needs of each school to support the programs listed in the Implementation Plan. The KBE unanimously approved both facilities plans and conveyed a commitment to aggressively pursue funding for them.

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

Traditionally, there have been significant achievement gaps in test scores and success rates of students who are deaf/hard of hearing and/or blind/visually impaired. Program modifications at KSB and KSD and expanded roles as statewide resource centers will serve to reduce the gaps and better prepare these students for successful transitions to adult life.

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Date:

August 2006